



DONNA SEIDEL
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
85TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony of Rep. Donna Seidel
Assembly Bill 209
Assembly Committee on Urban and Local Affairs
May 5, 2009

Good morning Chairwoman Berceau and members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of AB 209.

This legislation is very simple and straightforward. Under current law, county boards may appropriate money to community agencies that provide human services to local residents. This bill adds non-profits to the statute to explicitly authorize county boards to allocate money to these organizations as well.

I introduced this legislation at the request of the Marathon County Board, which voted to allocate funds to The Women's Community in Wausau to assist with their capital building project. Upon looking at the current state statutes, the Corporation Counsel realized that the board did not have this authority.

There are many organizations like The Women's Community in Wausau and around the state that play an important role in assisting citizens who are in need, especially during these challenging times. By authorizing counties to make contributions to non-profit organizations, we are giving counties one more option to choose from when allocating funds.

You will be receiving a letter of support from the Marathon County Board Chair. This bill also has the support of the Wisconsin Counties Association and the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

I would now like to introduce you to Jane Graham Jennings who is the Executive Director of The Women's Community who will explain how her organization would utilize the money from the Marathon County Board.

Thank you for your attention to this legislation.

Testimony



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To: Members of the Assembly on Committee on Urban and Local Affairs

From: Tony Gibart, Policy Coordinator, Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Date: Tuesday, May 5, 2009

Re: Assembly Bill 209

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide testimony on AB 209. AB 209 will allow county governments to contribute funding to non-profit organizations that provide assistance to low-income individuals or survivors of domestic violence and related crimes.

I represent the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV), which is the statewide voice for victims of domestic abuse and local domestic abuse service providers. These local programs are the frontline responders to victims of domestic violence across Wisconsin. WCADV fully supports AB 209 and thanks Representative Seidel for introducing this important measure.

Domestic violence not only affects individuals; it affects the community as a whole. Every county in Wisconsin responds to domestic violence through its law enforcement, emergency response, criminal justice, medical and human services systems. Local programs in every one of Wisconsin's 72 counties, to varying degrees, partner with county agencies to serve survivors and to eliminate violence. Because domestic violence is all too common—and its effects are so pervasive—local programs and county governments obviously have strong shared interests in both supporting survivors and preventing abuse.

The 2007 U.S. Mayor's Conference's Report on Hunger and Homelessness identified domestic violence as a leading cause of homelessness. Even more immediate, between April 17th and April 22nd of this year there were at least three domestic homicides in Wisconsin, specifically in Rock, Outagamie and Racine counties. A little over a month ago a domestic murder occurred in Marathon County. The unfortunate fact is that local governments, one way or another, have to grapple with the devastating effects domestic violence has on the stability and safety of their communities and residents.


AB 209 gives county governments more flexibility to proactively confront domestic violence. The bill allows counties to better support and assist the local programs in their communities. Local programs and shelters have the most experience in dealing with domestic violence and have unique abilities to address the needs of survivors, reduce the effects of abuse and ultimately prevent future violence. With the passage of AB 209, counties will be better able to ensure that local programs have the funding and resources they need to effectively provide these critical services to their communities. I urge you to support this bill. Thank you.



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MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Urban and Local Affairs

FROM: Sarah Diedrick-Kasdorf, Senior Legislative Associate 

DATE: May 5, 2009

SUBJECT: Support for Assembly Bill 209

The Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) supports Assembly Bill 209 which authorizes a county to provide assistance to a nonprofit organization that provides assistance to low-income individuals or individuals who are victims of domestic violence and related crimes.

County governments work with a wide array of service providers and nonprofit entities whose mission complements the work of county human/social service departments. As county governments are not statutorily provided home rule authority, counties may only undertake such tasks and functions expressly authorized in state statute. State statute does not expressly allow counties to make contributions to nonprofit organizations; therefore, the statutory change proposed in Assembly Bill 209 is necessary for counties to provide financial support to its partner agencies. Assembly Bill 209 codifies current practice happening in several counties across the state.

The bill does not require that counties make payments to nonprofit organizations; rather, it provides counties that wish to make a financial contribution the ability to do so.

WCA respectfully requests your support for Assembly Bill 209.

Thank you for considering our comments.



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MARATHON COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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Honorable Members of the Urban and Local Affairs Committee
State of Wisconsin
2009-2010 Legislature

RE: 2009 ASSEMBLY BILL 209

I support AB-209. This bill will authorize a county to appropriate money to a non-profit organization that provides assistance to low income individuals or individuals who are victims of domestic violence and related crimes.

Recently the Marathon County Board was frustrated in its desire to contribute to a capital campaign for a domestic violence shelter. This contribution was identified as a top priority by our Capital Improvements Committee, but was removed from the list of approved projects because it was determined that the County lacked the legal authority to take this action.

The Marathon County Board was able to provide the land for the construction of a new facility for the Humane Society, but was not able to contribute to the capital campaign of the women's shelter. Obviously, something needs correction and AB-209 will make the needed corrections.

Domestic Violence is an important issue in Marathon County. Our 2007-2009 Life Report identifies Domestic Abuse as one of the greatest three challenges for call to action. That report says that despite attention to this issue, domestic abuse continues to get worse and results in many women and children living in fear. This problem will require a collaborative community response. AB-209 will allow County Government to be a part of a community response.

I appreciate the support that our Marathon County Legislators have given to AB-209 including Assembly Representatives Seidel and Petrowski and Senator Decker. I also appreciate the support given to the Bill by the Wisconsin Counties Association.

Thank you for this opportunity to express support for AB-209.

Keith Langenhahn, Chair
Marathon County Board of Supervisors